



Coast Guard HR Flag Voice 72

JUNIOR OFFICERS AND THEIR OERs

For quite some time, the question whether Reported-on Officers should write their own Officer Evaluation Reports (OERs) has generated discussion among the officer corps. This is a particular concern voiced to me by junior officers. Recent information from the Junior Officer Needs Assessment (JONA) and National Naval Officers Association (NNOA) national convention corroborates this issue, an important leadership subject we need to address. To be clear, no official written policy or training guidance suggests, promotes, or condones the practice of "requiring" officers to write their own OERs. Although earlier (early 1990's) OER training policy may have suggested this practice was a practical way for an officer to assist his or her rating chain, current OER guidance clearly establishes acceptable practices for submitting performance documentation; these do not involve the Reported-on Officer's self-written OER. Officers are advised to prepare their OER material for each evaluative area in bullet format, listing examples of strong accomplishments, showing how well they performed them, and estimating their impact or significance, for submission to the rating chain. If done well, the officer's rating officials could use these bullets in the OER - a different concept than Reported-on Officers writing their own OERs.

Officers, especially junior officers, should not write their own OERs for several reasons:

1. Rating officials must strive to keep in touch with their subordinates and maintain open communications, i.e., feedback, during the period. If a disparity exists between the rating official's expectations and the Reported-on Officer's perspective of his or her performance, the self-written OER will further widen that gap and create false expectations in the Reported-on Officer.
2. The OER is designed so rating officials compare an officer's performance and behavior to the evaluative standards and then justify those evaluative marks in comments. This process is reversed if a Reported-on Officer comments first in a self-written OER. This inverted process can create inconsistency in the OER between very positive comments supporting mediocre marks.
3. Junior officers lack experience in the Officer Evaluation System (OES). While the OES has no "magic bullet" phrases, we do expect OERs will clearly reflect observed performance and its significance. It takes experience with the system, including being evaluated yourself for a while, to understand what and how to document performance. An ENS or LTJG especially lacks the experience to know what key things are important to say and how to articulate them to highlight their significance. Accepting even a DRAFT OER from a JO makes it all too easy to sign and submit it. If a rating official "rubber stamps" an OER a junior Reported-on Officer has written, the resultant OER may not clearly reflect the officer's performance.

4. Most importantly, the junior officer remains in doubt about his or her efforts' results. "Did I do myself justice?" is the question often asked, a question the Reported-on Officer should not have to answer. The officer should be concerned only with ensuring he or she has provided to the Supervisor all major events, projects, efforts, accomplishments, etc., with specific impacts and results for the reporting period. The boss must have the final word on how well the officer accomplished any of those things.

JONA and NNOA identified supervisors' lack of feedback as a problem. Couple this with JOs writing their own OERs without feedback, and you can see this becomes a critical issue. I can't over-emphasize the importance of feedback as the key to developing the capabilities of not only our junior officers but all our personnel for whom we have a leadership responsibility. If the officer personnel management system is to work, we must count on all officers to fulfill their responsibility to accurately, fairly, and objectively evaluate all juniors in their chain of command. Otherwise, selections for promotions, assignments, advanced education, and other career opportunities will not reflect our officers' true potential.

I encourage all officers to take advantage of CGPC-opm-3's road show, when available, to educate themselves about OES requirements. Please visit their web site at for additional information, help obtaining the training tape, or a copy of the opm-3 slide show.

Regards, FL Ames

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